THE REEF SEEKER

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EFFECTS OF EL NIÑO

To paraphrase Clara Peller, "Where's the kelp???"

A lot of time we simply think of El Niño as a warming-water phenomenon but it's much more extensive than that. But warming water is likely the most obvious of the effects when we're diving. And while everyone appreciates the warmer water temps, as I'm sure you know, it's not good for things like the kelp.

We have probably hit our peak water temps by now, so things will start cooling down this month, but the effects of the warmer water are certainly evident. We're hearing of very interesting animal sightings including a small pod of orcas of off Newport Beach, we've seen turtle laying eggs in areas where they've never been before, and sightings of mobula rays have gotten people excited. By the same token, the warmer water seems to have chased animals who prefer a bit more of a nippy temp, like Giant Sea Bass, to seek deeper depths where the water temps are much cooler.

And all of this comes with a downside, the most obvious being that the water in many areas is simply too warm for the kelp, and it's started dying off. We're starting to get more reports of thinned-out kelp which will start to have a cascading effect since it also means less habitat for many animals that depend on the kelp for shelter, or places to nourish young, or simply a place to hide and wait until unsuspecting prey comes by.

El Niño not only disrupts our water temperatures but also affects climate as well. You may have noticed that this year, we've had an amazing number of Pacific hurricanes, some of which have taken a northward turn as they move and while we haven't had any direct hits in SoCal, the storms get close enough that they produce massive waves and shore break that has eroded beaches and destroyed homes, dumped unexpected rain in areas causing flash floods, and then add king tides to all of that and the problems multiply.

On top of all of that, and I'm not sure if this is El Niño-related or not, we had that heat dome that sat over SoCal for a month or so, giving us very hot temps, not too much cooling off at night, and low humidity. That last aspect means we may have increased our fire danger. It doesn't hurt to remember that the Altadena and Palisades fires occurred in January.

But El Niños can also sometimes produce heavy rainfall in the first months of a new year so we may be faced with the prospects of mudslides from areas that are still denuded from the fires and if/when the rains come, the ground get saturated since there's no vegetation to absorb water, and the lack of vegetation may mean that the ground gives way and now we've got ocean-adjacent fire areas washing into the Pacific.

So it's certainly not over yet and while you may feel helpless about all of these developments, there are still things we can do like watching natural resource usage, making sure trash isn't on the ground to wash into storm drains and go in the ocean, and stuff like that that may not have an immediate effect, but which can hopefully help mitigate some things down the road.

AIRFARES

Don't freak out when you start looking at airfares. There's no question they're high now due to the rising cost of fuel this year. Will they come back down to more

reasonable levels? Don't know. I do know that once you've settled on where you want to go, it pays to regularly check the fares because they will bounce around, both higher and lower.

One other thing I do – I'll use the Saba trip in April as an example - is I'll first check to see what the fare is for the dates we want to go. Then I'll check a month earlier, and perhaps a month earlier than that. This gives me some idea of the range of pricing.

For Saba, when I first checked, the flights (LAX through Newark to Sint Maarten on United and then to Saba) were around $1,600. Then they shot up to $2,100. By the same token, that same sked in March is $1,500, in February is $1,200, and in January is $900.

The problem with all of this is that you just don't know if you bought at the right time. It really is airfare roulette. But at least knowing the range of prices, it gives you some idea of what an airline thinks they can get for that particular route. And if you see that the price for the dates you want to go suddenly drop, you'll have an idea of whether or not it's a good deal.

Also remember that anytime you buy an airline ticket, and it doesn't matter if it's a US-based carrier or not and it doesn't matter if it's a domestic trip or a foreign one, you've got 24 hours to cancel without penalty. So for any trip, once you buy the ticket, check back every few hours to see if the price dropped. If it has, cancel your first ticket and buy at the new price. (Or buy the cheaper ticket first and THEN cancel the more expensive one.)

This is all because airlines nowadays routinely practice what's known as "dynamic pricing" which is a short-handed way of saying they try to charge as much as the market will bear to maximize their revenue. On the other hand, we want to minimize our financial outlay for a ticket. So hopefully some of these tips will help you down the road.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Our recent experience on our Philippines trip, where two people got sick enough that they decided to leave a week early and forgo the liveaboard portion of the trip, underscores the value of trip insurance. One person still has their claim pending but the other got full reimbursement for the liveaboard trip, the dives she missed at the resort due to being sick, and some other minor expenses. (She had the D.A.N. travel insurance – which is different and separate from the D.A.N. accident insurance.) Needless to say, the trip insurance paid for itself.

One place where you can go shopping if you're not sure what to get is a consumer-friendly website called www.insuremytrip.com. It's a clearinghouse for various insurance options. You enter info about yourself and your trip and they'll show you a number of policies.

For instance, I just entered info for myself for a $5,000 Maldives trip which also included $2,000 airfare and $500 in hotels ($7,500 total) and got quotes that ranged from $390 to $1,328. You can select various plans and do comparisons as well. D.A.N. insurance (I didn't see them on Insure My Trip) with the same numbers ran anywhere from $603 to $842 depending on what coverage limits you wanted. (By the same token, D.A.N. has an annual plan that runs $403 to $940 for someone my age, depending again on how much coverage you want.)

It also pays to look at your credit cards and see if your cards offer travel coverage if you pay for the trip with that card. The catch might be that you need to pay for the entire trip with the card, not just a portion or the deposit. The second catch, certainly with us, is that we quote trip prices as cash or check so that paying with a credit card is slightly higher. At Reef Seekers, that's 4%. But if you look at the examples above, the insurance

2027 DIVING VACATIONS

April 3-10 • Saba

June 12-19 • Bonaire

October (TBA) • Roatan

Where to in 2028???

costs anywhere from 5-10% of the trip cost. So if you pay with a credit card and get coverage at 4%, that's not be a bad deal (based on what the coverage includes).

Also bear in mind that many of these trip insurance policies may include things like evacuation coverage and medical coverage. But if you have D.A.N. diving accident insurance – which you should have regardless – you may already have that type of coverage and you can reduce the travel insurance costs by not paying for coverage you could already have.

I know it sounds complicated but the point is that trips are expensive nowadays, even the "cheap" ones, and you may want to give some thought to protecting yourself against financial loss should something go wrong. Chances are that everything will be fine, but when it's not . . .

RESCUED SEA TURTLE EGGS UPDATE

As you may already know, two Olive Ridley turtles came ashore in Orange county in September and laid eggs. This is highly unusual and has never been observed before for this species at these locations. It's notable because the common wisdom is that turtles return to the beach where they were born to lay eggs.

Because this is so unusual and because there were anticipated high tides expected along with possible storm surge, all of which could destroy the nests, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service along with NOAA decided it would be best to remove the eggs from the beach and entrusted them to the care of the Aquarium of the Pacific where they have been sequestered in the hopes that they'll hatch. If they do, projected time is somewhere in early November.

Aquarium CEO Jeff Flocken recently sent out an internal update on the 204 eggs and the short version is that they're resting quietly and fingers crossed that some or all of them hatch.

USF&WS also released a statement: "*The Olive Ridley sea turtle eggs that were relocated in late September 2026 from Orange County beaches to the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California, remain under care and observation. With hatching possible in November, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries are coordinating with local partners, including aquarium staff and the cities of Seal Beach and Huntington Beach, to prepare for the potential hatchlings' release promptly after emergence. Planning includes determining location and evaluating beach conditions, water temperatures and best release practices. Hatchlings instinctively move toward the brightest horizon and should reach the ocean within 24 hours to reduce risks of dehydration and predation. There is always a possibility that the eggs may not be viable and therefore, may not hatch. We will continue to provide updates as new information becomes available.*"

The Aquarium also created a short video narrated by Dr. Lance Adams, the resident vet, about how these are being cared for and shows you exactly what's being done: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/UzH3Ut2ztSg?feature=share.

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED ACTIVITY	$$$
Wed.	Nov. 4	--- CLASS ---	--- TABLES & COMPUTERS ---	**25**
Wed.	11	*Catalina Express*	Avalon UW Park	**180**
Thu.	19	Veterans Park	• • • Night Dive • • •	**25**
Sat.	28	Veterans Park	Navigation Made Easy	**25**
Wed.	Dec. 2	--- CLASS ---	--- PHOTO WORKSHOP ---	**25**
Wed.	9	*Catalina Express*	Avalon UW Park	**180**
Sat.	12	Veterans Park	Surf Entries Made Easy	**25**
Thu.	17	Veterans Park	• • • Squid Dive (night) • • •	**FREE!!!**



ADVANCED/OTHER CLASSES FOR 2027

I'm starting to work on the sked for the not-basic classes that we offer. Quite candidly, not many of you sign up for these but by the same token, we think they're useful classes for certified divers and we will continue to offer them since we believe that when you got your basic open-water card, that was the beginning of your scuba education, not the end of it.

What we generally offer are the following (in no particular order): Navigation, Photo workshop, Fish ID, Nitrox, Understanding Dive Tables & Computers, a variety of beach classes, squid dives (in season) night dives (year-round), and monthly day trips to dive the Ava-

lon Underwater Park. Some classes are Zoom-based and some are actual in-person dives. If you sign up for any of these – and we'll many times do these with only one person – terrific. And if you don't, it just means I get the day or the night off.

But the reason I'm writing this article now is to ask: Any there any classes or types of training we don't offer that you'd like to see us offer in 2027? If there is something we don't have on our list, drop an e-mail to me at kenkurtis@aol.com or call us at 310/652-4990. As the saying goes, "Give the public what they want" and the best way for me to do that is for you to tell me, "I'm interested in this but not in that." Thanks.

MAKE SURE YOU VOTE

I'm not going to try to persuade you who to vote for (though most of you likely know which political direction I'd be encouraging you to lean) but I will remind you that the genral saying is that you get the government you deserve.

What's disheartening is that in the last major election in 2024, 64% of eligible voters cast a ballot but 36% did not. That means, with a vote roughly split down the middle, the preferences of 32% of the electorate set the direction for 100% of the people.

I truly hope you were not one of the non-voters. And if you were, I hope you'll be going to the polls by Tuesday to cast your ballot. By the same token, I'm also hopeful you'll read up on the various candidates and propositions and cast an informed vote. Whether or not we agree politically on the issues, hopefully you can read up on the issues and candidate positions and choose in a way that represents the direction you would like us as a community and a country to head.

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME ENDED

Hopefully you've remembered to "Fall Back" and reset your clocks so that 2:00AM Sunday, November 1, became 1:00AM. By the same token, if you found that you've been an hour early to everything on the first day of November, now you know why.

PICTURE PAGE - Halloween (orange) critters

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2026)



Garibaldi
(SoCal)

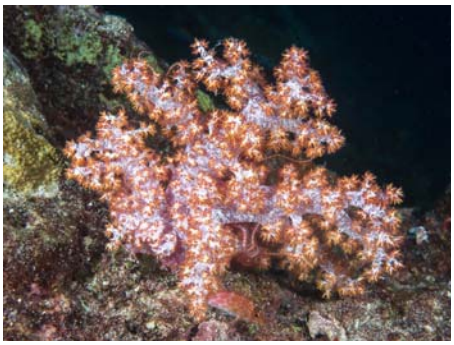
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Clownfish
(Yap)



Encrusting sponge
(Easter Island)



Orange-polyp soft coral
(Maldives)



Orange-sided Filefish
(Roatan)